

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION
FOR
METHODS AND SYSTEMS
FOR DEBUGGING A COMPUTER PROGRAM CODE
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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

**METHODS AND SYSTEMS
FOR DEBUGGING A COMPUTER PROGRAM CODE**

Field of the Invention

[001] The technical field of the present invention is in the area of electronic data processing. More particularly, the invention relates to methods, computer program products and systems for debugging a program code, such as the code of a computer software program.

Background Information

[002] When developing a computer software program, debugging of the program code is often difficult and time consuming. Debugging is often performed in the following manner: finding a program part which causes problems, finding relevant lines of the program code, setting breakpoints in places in the program code which are of interest regarding the status of certain variables, and executing the program code with a debugging software ("debugger"). When executing the debugger, a run-time environment of the program developing environment starts executing the program code, stops its execution at the first breakpoint in the order of the execution, and usually displays the content of the variables for analysis. In order to run the debugger, a failure in the program code (bug) does not need to be present. Also, the debugger may be used to only show the content of certain variables.

[003] The aforementioned debugging procedure has certain disadvantages. The performance of the first three steps discussed above may require a high

workload if debugging has to be frequently repeated. Program developers and co-workers, who maintain the program, need a good understanding of the entire program code, although only a part of the code might be relevant for debugging purposes. Another disadvantage is that the breakpoints are automatically deleted when closing the program. Therefore, when starting the debugging software in a new session, the breakpoints have to be reset.

[004] In view of the foregoing, there is a need for debugging methods and/or systems that provide a more efficient solution to one or more of the problems described above.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[005] In accordance with the invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, methods and systems consistent with the principles described herein provide for the debugging of computer program code by using a debugging software. Software means may be provided for causing the debugging software to stop at one or more types of breakpoints set in the computer program code. In one embodiment, the method comprises: debugging a program code having at least one type of breakpoint, and selectively activating or deactivating all breakpoints of the at least one type by a single action.

[006] In accordance with another aspect of the invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, methods and systems consistent with the principles described herein provide a computer system for debugging computer program code by using a debugging software, which provides software means for causing the

debugging software to stop at one or more types of breakpoints set in the computer program code. In accordance with one embodiment, the computer system comprises: a memory including program instructions, an input means for entering data, a storage means for storing data, and a processor responsive to the program instructions for debugging a program code including at least one type of breakpoint and for activating or deactivating all breakpoints of the at least one type by a single action.

[007] Embodiments of the invention are further directed to a computer readable medium, a computer program and a carrier signal comprising instructions for debugging program code according to the methods described herein.

[008] Additional objects and advantages of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows, and in part will be obvious from the description, or may be learned by practice of the invention. The objects and advantages of the invention will be realized and attained by means of the elements and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

[009] It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only and are not restrictive of the invention, as claimed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate several embodiments of the invention

and together with the description, explain the principles of the invention. In the drawings:

[0011] FIG. 1 is an exemplary computer system for implementing embodiments of the present invention; and

[0012] FIG. 2 shows a schematic representation of an exemplary screen mask to activate or deactivate breakpoints, consistent with embodiments of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0013] Reference will now be made in detail to embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings and described herein. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawings to refer to the same or like parts. The exemplary embodiments disclosed herein are intended for purposes of illustration and should not be construed to limit the invention in any manner.

[0014] Within the scope of this description, the terms of the invention used in this specification have the meaning that is usual in programming languages like C, C++, JAVA, ABAP, ABAP Objects. The following explanations are made with reference to the FIGS. 1 to 2. The given examples are of explanatory nature only and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention

[0015] In particular, a breakpoint or a breakpoint instruction, both terms being used herein alternatively, may be any software means or code, which causes a debugging software to stop at a point in a program code, at which the breakpoint

or breakpoint instruction is set. Debugging a program code may encompass, within the scope of the invention, executing a program code by means of the debugging software. Whether the program code contains failures (bugs) or not is irrelevant. Further, consistent with embodiments of the invention, a breakpoint may be implemented in a program code by a macro call. The macro may be an abbreviation of the program coding containing the breakpoint instruction. In the macro, the breakpoint may be included in a conditional instruction having one or more conditions. The conditional instruction must be fulfilled if the breakpoint instruction can be executed by a run-time environment. By this method, a type of breakpoint can be defined. Each type of breakpoint may be characterized by a particular set of conditions. The implementation by a macro is not inevitably necessary. However, it reduces the programming effort considerably.

[0016] A condition (abbreviated as "cond") can be any type of logical comparison of data known by those skilled in the art. Two or more conditions can be combined by logical connections "AND", "OR" and/or "XOR" as may be appropriate in the respective case.

[0017] The conditions may be structured such that in all macros of a given program an identical condition must be fulfilled. In this case, the identical condition works like a main switch. Further, in different macros, additional to such a general condition, second, third, fourth or more conditions may be implemented. Structures mixed with "AND", "OR" and/or "XOR" connections are also possible.

[0018] The macros can be stored in one or more separate files, which may be included into the program code by include instructions in the definition part of the

program. This procedure makes the breakpoints persistent with respect to the closing of the program.

[0019] In one embodiment, different macros may be defined using different sets of conditions, thereby creating different types of breakpoints. The different sets of one or more conditions can be stored in one or more arrays or in one or more tables in volatile and/or non-volatile memory. For example, the array or table can be made accessible for only one type of macro. The set or sets of conditions may be edited during the debugging procedure. This allows, by setting or deactivation of software switches, that all or only certain types of breakpoints, such as those which have one common condition included in the respective macros, be activated or deactivated by a single action. This may be implemented through various approaches. For example, a screen mask may be provided through which a software switch is activated or deactivated by a mouse click or a key stroke. Such a screen mask may be a graphical user interface through which reading and/or writing access is provided to an array that stores one or more conditions.

[0020] In another embodiment, a macro is provided where at least one of the conditions is whether a string variable handed over by the macro is identical to a respective variable stored in the arrays or tables mentioned above. In this case, a query may be started to check whether a preset string is equal to the string given in the macro.

[0021] In yet another embodiment, a type of breakpoint may be, for example, a macro in which at least one condition is realized by the classical "if" instruction.

This is pointed out in more detail in the following example:

```
MACRO_1:  
IF cond0 = TRUE AND cond1 = TRUE THEN  
    BREAKPOINT  
ENDIF
```

Additionally, or alternatively, "case" or "select case" or similar instructions may be used.

[0022] Exemplary embodiments of the invention, by using a breakpoint of the latter type and a screen mask, is shown by the schematic drawings in FIGS. 1 and 2:

[0023] FIG. 1 shows a computer system environment 1 for allowing a user to debug program code by means of a debugger, according to the principles as described herein. Computer system 1 comprises a server 3 with a central processing unit 5, a net connection 4 for connection with at least one input/output means 2 (e.g., a screen and/or a keyboard), at least one data storage means 7 and a memory 6 including program code and debugging software. On the screen, a screen mask such as window 8 for providing read and write access to the storage means 7 is shown.

[0024] In FIG. 2, a schematic representation is provided of an exemplary screen mask to activate or deactivate breakpoints, consistent with embodiments of the invention. Program code stored in memory 6 may include various macros. In the example of FIG. 2, three types of macros are illustrated, each of which includes an "if" instruction and a breakpoint instruction (breakpoint). The three types of breakpoints are named MACRO_1, MACRO_2 and MACRO_"XYZ". In each breakpoint, a different set of conditions has to be fulfilled in order to cause the debugger to stop at the respective breakpoint. For example, MACRO_1 includes

cond0 and cond1, MACRO_2 includes cond0 and cond2, and MACRO_ "XYZ" includes cond0 and condn. Whether a condition is fulfilled or not can be decided by the contents of the respective fields of a data array 11, where respective fields may be allocated to respective conditions. For example, in FIG. 2, fields "cond*i*" with *i* from 1 to *n* are allocated to the conditions of the same name.

[0025] In the exemplary embodiment of FIG. 2, cond0 reads as: if the content of field cond0 in the data array is TRUE (i.e., contains the boolean value TRUE), then cond0 is fulfilled. Further, condn reads as: if the content of field condn of the data array is equal to "XYZ" (i.e., contains the string "XYZ"), then condn is fulfilled.

[0026] In the example of FIG. 2, the fields of data array 11 can be accessed by read and write operations by a user via a graphical user interface such as window 8, which provides means for editing data. A user may set a field in the data array to TRUE or FALSE (boolean variable) by clicking with a mouse on boxes 9 named, for example, according to the conditions they refer to. A "V" or other appropriate character(s) or symbol(s) may be used to indicate that the content of the respective field in the data array 11 has the content TRUE. Further, a blank or different character(s) may indicate to the user that the content of the respective field in the data array 11 has the content FALSE. The string for condn may be edited via a keyboard in a screen field 10. As will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, screen window 8 may have additional attributes, such as an "OK" button to save entries in storage and a "Cancel" button to escape without saving. Other attributes may also be provided, such as a "Close" button.

[0027] As can be deduced from FIG. 2, cond0 is a general condition, which allows a user to completely deactivate all macros (MACRO_1, MACRO_2 and MACRO_ "XYZ") in the program by one click. Further, in the example of FIG. 2, only the breakpoint instructions in MACRO_2 and MACRO_ "XYZ" will be executed (i.e., cond1 is FALSE, whereas cond2 is TRUE and condn is "XYZ" in the data array 11), which means that the debugger will stop at the respective places where the macros are incorporated in the program code.

[0028] The invention is of a general nature and may use debugging software in any programming language or environment which supports a statement to define a breakpoint, such as FORTRAN, PASCAL, C, C++, ABAP, ABAP Objects or Visual Basic. One technical advantage of the breakpoints according to the inventive concept is that such breakpoints, when set in a program code, are persistent even if the debugging session is closed.

[0029] Computer programs or routines based on the written description of this invention are within the skill of an experienced developer.

[0030] The invention and its embodiments may be implemented in digital electronic circuitry, or in computer hardware, firmware, software, or any combinations thereof. The invention may be implemented as a computer program product (e.g., a computer program in which predefined breakpoints and/or screen masks are available) tangibly embodied in an information carrier (e.g., in a machine-readable storage device or in a propagated signal) for execution by or to control the operation of a data processing apparatus (e.g., a programmable processor, a computer, or multiple computers). The computer program code can be written in

any form of programming language, including compiled or interpreted languages, and it can be deployed in any form, including as a stand-alone program or as a module, component, subroutine, or other unit suitable for use in a computing environment. A computer program may be deployed to be executed on one computer or on multiple computers at one site or distributed across multiple sites and interconnected by a communication network.

[0031] Method steps of the invention and its embodiments may be performed by one or more programmable processors executing a computer program to perform functions of the invention by operating on input data and generating output.

[0032] Processors suitable for the execution of a computer program can include, by way of example, both general and special purpose microprocessors, and one or more processors of any kind of digital computer. Generally, a processor can receive instructions and data from a read-only memory, a random access memory, or both. The essential elements of a computer include a processor for executing instructions and one or more memory devices for storing instructions and data. Generally, a computer may also include, or be operatively coupled to receive data from or transfer data to, or both, one or more mass storage devices for storing data (e.g., magnetic, magneto-optical disks, or optical disks). Information carriers suitable for embodying computer program instructions and data include all forms of non-volatile memory, including by way of example: semiconductor memory devices, such as EPROM, EEPROM, and flash memory devices; magnetic disks such as internal hard disks and removable disks; magneto-optical disks; and CD-ROM and

DVD-ROM disks. The processor and the memory may be supplemented by, or incorporated in, ASICs (application-specific integrated circuits).

[0033] To provide for interaction with a user, the invention can be implemented on a computer having a display device such as a CRT (cathode ray tube) or LCD (liquid crystal display) monitor for displaying information to the user and a keyboard and a pointing device such as a mouse or a trackball by which the user can provide input to the computer. Other kinds of devices may be used to provide for interaction with a user as well. For example, feedback provided to the user may be any form of sensory feedback, such as visual feedback, auditory feedback, or haptic feedback. Further, input from the user may be received in any form, including acoustic, speech, or haptic input.

[0034] Other embodiments of the invention, including modifications and adaptations of the disclosed embodiments, will be apparent to those skilled in the art from consideration of the specification and practice of the invention disclosed herein. The foregoing descriptions of implementations of the invention have been presented for purposes of illustration and description. The descriptions are not exhaustive and do not limit the invention to the precise form disclosed. Modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teachings or may be acquired from practicing the invention. For example, the described implementations include software, but systems and methods consistent with the present invention may be implemented as a combination of hardware and software or in hardware alone. Additionally, although aspects of the present invention are described as being stored in memory, one skilled in the art will appreciate that these aspects can also be stored on other

types of computer-readable media, such as secondary storage devices, for example, hard disks, floppy disks, or CD-ROM; the Internet or other propagation medium; or other forms of RAM or ROM. Therefore, it is intended that the specification and examples be considered as exemplary only, with a true scope and spirit of the invention being indicated by the following claims.